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Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
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5635 Ellsworth Ave.
Dallas, Texas 75206

04-296

October 6, 2004

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Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

Re: Notice of Proposed Rulemaking: Review of the Emergency Alert System

Dear Sir or Madam:

In my review of the FCC's notice of proposed rulemaking entitled "Review of the Emergency Alert System," I feel it would benefit the commission to here the perspective of a relatively young person on this issue. I am a college student of 22 years of age and find myself using several forms of communication on a daily basis. It is not uncommon for me to watch television while surfing the internet, monitoring my email, and talking on my cell phone. I recognize the changes American culture has undergone in just the last few years. We are increasingly becoming an information society and, as I previously alluded to, we surround ourselves with an overwhelming amount of media in which we receive our information.

It is my opinion that the current procedures for alerting the public through emergency alert systems have differing results. In my experience, the television has been a very effective tool for disseminating information quickly. I am very familiar with the high pitch pings that commonly precede an emergency message and am, in a sense, conditioned to immediately focus on the television for details and/or instructions. Recently, local Amber Alerts have been added to the emergency alerts that are broadcasted over the television in my area. They have reportedly aided in the recovery of several kidnapping victims since the time they began. It is clear to me that the television is a successful way of alerting the public to emergencies.

On the flip-side, it is not my experience that the radio has served as an effective medium for emergency alert systems. I am personally unsure of how to better the use of radio in emergency alerts, but I do know that I am guilty of changing the station when an emergency alert test is played. I find myself searching for emergency information on the radio only when I get into poor weather conditions. Whatever the reason, the radio has not, in my personal experience, been a effective medium for emergency alerts.

In regards to the FCC's desire to update the Federal Emergency Alert System (EAS), I believe there are several steps that the FCC can take to utilize new technologies in alerting the public to emergencies. First, the FCC mentioned cell phones in the NPRM. I believe that this is an excellent idea. "Text messaging" is an effective way for

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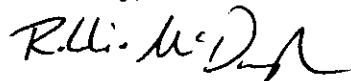
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communicating information that is both quick for the communicator and easily accessible to the receiver. I do not believe that "voice messaging" is as effective. "Voice messaging" requires the receiver to dial their voice message service, enter a password and then receive the message. "Text messaging" on the other hand, is sent directly to the cell phone and is immediately available for viewing. Second, I believe the FCC should consider email as a viable medium for sending alerts. While email is probably not as quick as text messaging, it is a medium of communication that many people monitor on a regular basis. The modern workplace utilizes email to communicate its important company wide messages. Many employers are even equipping employees with PDA's to communicate via email when a computer is not accessible. Email is becoming more and more of an instantaneous form of communication and I believe it should be considered in this review process. Finally, I would like the FCC to consider the growing popularity of satellite based media. Two examples that come to mind are satellite radio and global positioning systems (GPS). Both of these technologies have the potential to serve as effective media for the EAS; however, because I am relatively unfamiliar with these two forms of media, I cannot adequately suggest ways of utilizing them.

It is clear that there are several new types of media that could be utilized by the EAS; the question now is how the FCC gains access to these mediums. To begin with, a voluntary system is the best way to collect the necessary information. In this era of information overload, it is easy for institutions and organizations to overstep their bounds and infringe on the privacy of the individual. If the FCC employs favorable methods, it can collect its desired information from a large majority of the public. Simple voluntary partnerships with employers and service providers could easily result in the accumulation of lists for these alerts. The FCC could also collect this information through government agencies such as the IRS on tax filings. The point is that there are literally hundreds of different avenues for obtaining the information through voluntary means.

In closing, the EAS could and should be updated to include many of the new technologies available today. Information is a commodity of which we can never have too much. So, it is important that the government continues to find better and faster ways of communicating important information as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "R.R. McDonough", written in a cursive style.

Robert R. McDonough